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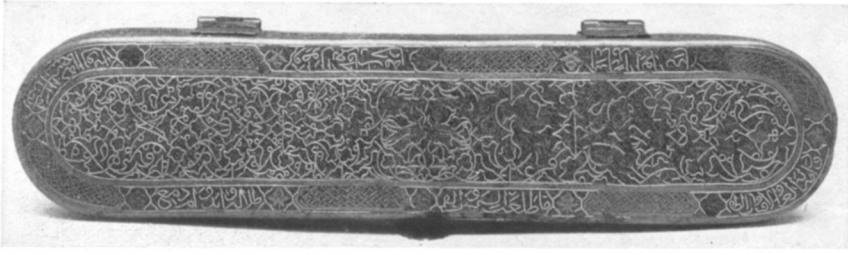
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PEN-CASE, 13TH CENTURY

## SARACENIC METAL WORK



CASKET, 14TH CENTURY

**A**MONG the examples of Oriental metal work to be found in the Edward C. Moore Collection are a number of objects of Saracenic origin. There are existing dated specimens which show that the art of inlaying and chasing brass and copper vessels flourished in Mesopotamia in the early part of the thirteenth century, although it had in all probability been developing for centuries before that time. In fact, Mr. Gaston Migeon, in an article in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* quotes the testimony of Ibn-Said, an Arabian geographer, who in the twelfth century described the inhabitants of Mosil in Mesopotamia as "showing great ability in the different branches of art, particularly in the manufacture of copper vases."

The earliest known examples of this

Saracenic art indicate that originally decoration in relief was almost exclusively used, later, the use of incrustations of silver began to appear, at first lightly, then more and more boldly applied until every part of the design was invaded by plates of the precious metal and the use of relief was abandoned. The Mosil style of decoration of the thirteenth century is characterized by the lavish use of the figures of men and animals, and we find in the medallions encircling the vessels spirited representations of hunting scenes in which turbaned cavaliers gallop along, falcon on wrist, alternating with picture of princes seated cross-legged on their thrones attended by their vizirs. A curious detail of this ornamentation is the occasional use of the human figure to represent letters in the inscriptions which run around the vessels in narrow bands. There exists, too, quite a large number of Saracenic brasses whose characteristics connect them with the ateliers of Mosil, but which were apparently manufactured for the use of Christians, the figures portrayed being in devotional attitudes and their heads encircled by halos, similarly treated vessels both in metal and faience pottery are found in Persia and Turkestan, but in these cases the nimbus is owing to Chinese influence and is not of Christian origin.

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, numbers of the metal workers of Mosil, either oppressed by Mongolian rule, or in answer to the growing demand caused by their fame, seem to have migrated to Cairo in Egypt, Damascus in Syria to Persia, and Samarkand Central



WATER JAR, 14TH CENTURY

Asia, where they carried on the traditions of their art. Their productions at first did not distinguish themselves by any new characteristics, but little by little the figures of men and animals, so profusely used by the Mosil artists, began to disappear and were replaced in the brasses of Syrian origin by decorations of birds, foliage and flowers, while at Cairo the use of inscriptions took on a capital importance, the inscription occupying generally the body of the object which it decorated, whether ewer, candlestick or water bottle, the birds and flowers being merely decorative accessories.

During the same period this art of metal working had penetrated into Persia, where it appears at Ispahan to have reached its height during the fourteenth century. These brasses reproduced all the characteristic details of the Mosil

work. The figures, however, changed greatly in type and the *baik* and *gandourah* of the Arabian costume were replaced by loose floating garments. In their later development the Persian brasses show an extreme delicacy of ornamentation although lacking the force and breadth of design of the earlier works, and the use of gold to further enrich the objects became frequent.

In the sixteenth century this art of inlaying brass with silver was brought to Europe from the Orient, and there was founded in Venice a school of metal workers calling themselves *Azzimini*, in whose hands the style gradually changed in character, the somewhat severe outlines of the true Saracenic bowls and candlesticks giving place to more graceful Western shapes.

A. M. S.



DETAIL FROM A CANDLESTICK, 14TH CENTURY